









**FIFTY YEARS**  
**OF THE**  
**AMERICAN LIBRARY**  
**ASSOCIATION**

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# FIFTY YEARS OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION<sup>1</sup>

**I**N October, 1876, in the city of Philadelphia, at the time of the Centennial Exhibition, our first world's fair, about one hundred librarians met together and held a three days' conference, and, in the rooms then occupied by the Pennsylvania Historical Society, these pioneers of the service of the book effected a permanent association, and started on its career an organization whose history is practically the history of the development of American libraries.

This statement is not to be interpreted to mean that there were no libraries in this country prior to 1876, or that the vision of public service performed by publicly owned books was there unfolded for the first time. But it is true that that year marked the beginning of a new era in library development, and that not only the direction in which the new movement would develop was then and there unconsciously defined to a considerable degree, but the *modus operandi* as well was largely determined. The principles of modern library control and management, which those of the craft glibly term library economy, began there to be laid down, and what has since evolved is largely a fruition of seed there sown. Before 1876 municipally supported public libraries existed, it is true, but in isolated examples; after that date they sprang up and developed rapidly as accepted municipal institutions, the movement gathering momentum as it went, until now, as we look back over this fifty-year period, we find publicly supported libraries nearly as widely distributed as publicly supported schools.

<sup>1</sup>An address delivered on March 1, 1926, before the Chicago Literary Club.

To see this half-century of growth in its proper perspective we need to cast our eyes for a moment back of the year 1876, even beyond that hundred-year period which the Philadelphia Centennial was celebrating. In the first two hundred years of our history there were no libraries anywhere in the western hemisphere which would now be considered worthy of the name, but here and there we glimpse unmistakable indications that our forefathers appreciated the importance of books not only in their own homes and lives, but realized as well the importance of making them available to others. Thus we see the first institution of higher learning in the new world founded in part on the private library of John Harvard; we see a group of earnest gentlemen a few years later in the neighboring colony of Connecticut laying their books on a table and saying, "I give these books for the founding of a college in this colony"; we see, as early as 1723, the faculty of William and Mary College instructing John Randolph, about to start for England, to spend part of a fund of five hundred pounds in the purchase of proper books for the college library, "and to help you in this choice," wrote the president of the college, "you will have with you two catalogues; one, of those books the college is possessed of already and another, of those which an ancient minister designs shortly to leave to it, that you may not buy them"; still farther south we see, in 1748, a group of young men forming "The Charleston Library Society" and raising a fund to collect "such new pamphlets and magazines as should occasionally be published in Great Britain"; we see Abraham Redwood, in 1747, giving five hundred pounds for the purchase of books for a library in Newport, Rhode Island; and even at an earlier date we see Benjamin Franklin laying the foundation of our first circulating library, and thus becoming truly the father of the public library movement in America.

But with all these good intentions and early foundations the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century college libraries and circulating subscription libraries must have been but a dreary lot, and about most of them probably could have been said with equal

truth what James Manning, the first president of Brown University, wrote of their library in 1772: "At present we have but about 250 volumes, and these not well chosen, being such as our friends could best spare."

Libraries grew rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century. But not yet was it the era of the municipal tax-supported institution. It was rather the period of the young men's institute, the lyceum, the mechanic's institute, the mercantile library, and the athenaeum. College libraries were increasing in number of volumes, but not astonishingly in number of readers. Many of them were housed in a room or two of some administrative building or recitation hall, open perhaps twice a week, and the librarian was an over-worked and under-paid professor who had this extra task saddled on him without extra compensation. But library consciousness was gradually awakening; library reports began to find their way into print and upon exchange lists, so that they were read by the library committees of kindred institutions; gradually a library literature evolved, quite unlike that of the later period, but nevertheless promising better things, as we hope our present-day library publications in turn promise better things.

#### THE FIRST CONVENTION OF LIBRARIANS

The modern American library movement nearly had its birth in 1853 instead of 1876. In September, 1853, there was held in the city of New York the first convention of librarians ever called in this country, and, so far as we know, the first ever called together in any country. A few progressive spirits felt that the time had come for an interchange of ideas, a recognition of the growing importance of "popular libraries," as the young men's institutes, athenaeums and other subscription libraries of the period were called, and perhaps for the formation of a permanent organization. The men who initiated the movement, framed the "Call," and pushed the venture through its early stages, were Charles B. Norton, a bookseller and publisher of New York, his



business associate, S. Hastings Grant, who was also librarian of the New York Mercantile Library, Reuben A. Guild, librarian of Brown University, Daniel C. Gilman, then assistant librarian of Yale, and in later life for more than a quarter-century president of Johns Hopkins University, and Charles C. Jewett, the assistant secretary and librarian of the recently established Smithsonian Institution. All of these gentlemen were present at the convention; Jewett was president of it, Grant, its secretary, and Norton the publisher of its proceedings. Others present who afterwards became prominent in various walks of life were Henry Barnard, of Hartford, who became (in 1867) the first United States Commissioner of Education, Edward Everett Hale, a Unitarian clergyman of Worcester, deeply interested then as always in popular education through libraries, and a young man who had recently graduated from Yale and who was, in 1853, librarian of the Mercantile Library Association of Boston. He appears to have been in that convention a listener at the feet of his seniors, for his name does not appear in any of the reported papers or discussions, but in the later history of the library movement in America the name of William Frederick Poole is found associated with every important measure over a period of nearly forty years. The minutes of this 1853 gathering record, however, that there was exhibited at the convention a copy, just off the press, of Poole's *Index to periodicals*, a modest octavo but nevertheless the ancestor and forerunner of the long line of periodical indexes without which it would now be impossible for librarians to do reference work worthy of the name, and without which what is now our wealth of periodical literature would hardly be worth the space it occupies.

There were eighty-two delegates present at the convention, all men, for the day of woman in library work was not yet. They came from twelve states and the District of Columbia, the more distant states represented being Ohio, Missouri, Louisiana, and California. "We meet," said Charles C. Jewett, in his address as president of the convention, "to provide for the diffusion of a

knowledge of good books, and for enlarging the means of public access to them. Our wishes are for the public, not for ourselves." This seems to have been the sentiment which dominated their three days' communing. It is unnecessary to give here a recital of the topics discussed. These were well selected and seriously and ably treated, but at this distance of time what was said is of less consequence than the fact that these men met, and the circumstances which prompted that meeting. Before they adjourned they passed a resolution that "This Convention be regarded as preliminary to the formation of a permanent Librarians' Association," appointed a committee of five to draft a constitution and by-laws, and voted that "when this Convention adjourn, it adjourn to meet in Washington City at such a time as the said Committee of five may appoint."

But for reasons which we need not rehearse here the committee never acted; no steps were taken to effect a permanent organization and no conference was called to meet in Washington. So the years drifted by. The panic of 1857 deprived many of the young struggling libraries of even the slender support they had been receiving; then loomed the clouds of civil war, followed by four years of struggle when men gathered for objects more grim than "to provide for the diffusion of a knowledge of good books." Then ensued the ten depressing years of reconstruction, and thus it came about that not until the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 was another convention of librarians called, or a further attempt made to organize a permanent association.

#### A STEADY GROWTH

In the meantime, notwithstanding these adverse national conditions, in the twenty-three years between 1853 and 1876, libraries forged rapidly ahead in number, in size and in usefulness.

In a twelve-hundred page report on public libraries in the United States, issued in 1876 by the U. S. Bureau of Education, and which formed, as Commissioner John Eaton's letter of transmittal stated, "a part of the exhibit made by this office at the

**Centennial Exhibition,"** some impressive figures are given regarding the growth of all kinds of libraries in the periods under consideration:

"The increasing rate of growth of public libraries in the last twenty-five years," says the report, "is well exhibited by the table, which shows that 20 libraries were formed from 1775 to 1800, 179 from 1800 to 1825, 551 from 1825 to 1850, and 2,240 from 1850 to 1875."

In 1776 there were, so far as is known, twenty-nine libraries in the thirteen colonies, possessing altogether about forty-five thousand volumes. In 1849, when library statistics were gathered by Jewett, of the Smithsonian Institution, the number of volumes in existing libraries had grown to about one million, six hundred thousand, but even this is but about half the number of volumes now possessed by either Harvard or the Library of Congress. In 1876 the number had grown to over twelve millions.

Now, in 1926, there are approximately eighteen thousand libraries in the United States and they contain over ninety million books. The work these libraries are doing and the influence their books are exerting is, however, more to the point. A word as to that later.

In 1853 the era of tax-supported municipal libraries had not dawned. True, in 1833, the selectmen of the little town of Peterborough, New Hampshire, had made history by voting to establish a town library and appropriating the munificent sum of \$66.84 from public funds for the purchase of books, the first action of the kind in the history of this or any other country. But not until 1854 was there a real beginning. Then the city of Boston appropriated \$5,000 from its city funds for library purposes and thus launched the long and notable career of the Boston Public Library. Other cities and towns followed suit, so that by 1876 there were reported to be one hundred and eighty-eight tax-supported libraries in the United States. "The rapid increase in the number and importance of public libraries, both in this country and in England, is perhaps the most marked feature

of educational development during the past twenty-five years," said William F. Poole, addressing his fellow-librarians at their conference at the Centennial Exhibition.

#### THE FIRST A.L.A. CONFERENCE

As there was, in 1876, no organization or individual charged with the responsibility of calling a conference of librarians, a young man with initiative, named Melvil Dewey, took it upon himself to appoint a committee to call the conference and make arrangements for it. Dewey, who had recently graduated from Amherst, was librarian of his Alma Mater, but was pretty much unknown to his confrères. He had, however, thus early in life the indomitable energy and enthusiasm that have made his name a household word in library circles as the proprietor of the Dewey Decimal Classification, as managing editor of the first library magazine, as the father of the library school movement, and as one of the founders of the American Library Association and a pioneer of its early days. The committee which he persuaded to accept this assignment consisted of Justin Winsor, the head of the Boston Public Library, Lloyd P. Smith, of the Philadelphia Library Company, and William F. Poole, librarian of the Chicago Public Library. From the youthful member whom we saw sitting silently in the 1853 convention Poole had become the "Nestor of librarians," a term we find frequently applied to him in the literature of the period, and his judgment and advice were sought on every important professional question. Succeeding Justin Winsor, he became the second president of the American Library Association, serving during the years 1885 to '87, and promoting its interests ably and wisely in that formative period.

The Philadelphia conference was a great success. One hundred and three persons registered as attendants, of whom about thirty represented public libraries. Thirteen were women, heralds of the day when three-quarters of those who tend the bibliothecal flame are of the feminine persuasion. Among those present who also attended the 1853 meeting, in addition to Poole, were Lloyd

P. Smith, Henry Barnard, ex-United States Commissioner of Education, Frederic Vinton of Princeton and Reuben A. Guild of Brown University. The scholarly Winsor, well known as historian as well as librarian, was unanimously elected president, and the energetic Dewey, secretary. The latter it was who coined the motto of the A.L.A., "The best reading for the greatest number, at the least cost."

#### ORGANIZATION

On the third day, October 6, a resolution was adopted which brought into being the American Library Association. It read:

"For the purpose of promoting the library interests of the country, and of increasing reciprocity of intelligence and good will among librarians and all interested in library economy and bibliographical studies, the undersigned form themselves into a body to be known as 'The American Library Association.'" Six of these organizers of our national association are still living, and they have appropriately been elected honorary vice-presidents for the Fiftieth Anniversary Conference, to be held in October, 1926, at Philadelphia and Atlantic City.

One of the delegates to the 1876 conference was James Yates, the librarian of the Free Library of Leeds, England. As an international courtesy he was elected one of the vice-presidents of the meeting. He participated in discussion and took an interested and active part generally. The next year, following the first conference of the American Library Association at New York, in September, 1877, twelve of the American librarians there in attendance sailed for England and were present at the organization and first meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom. The president of the convention, John Winter Jones, chief librarian of the British Museum, in his inaugural address said: "The idea of holding a Conference of Librarians originated in America—in that country of energy and activity which has set the world so many good examples, and of which a Conference of Librarians is not the least valuable, looking to the practical results which may be anticipated from it."

## INTERNATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

The American Library Association, it will be seen, became interested thus early in its career in international affairs. One of the pleasantest and most gratifying features of its half century of activity is the close and cordial relationship which American librarians have had throughout the years with their fellow-workers in the British Isles, which has resulted not only in many warm personal friendships but also in a number of important cooperative international enterprises.

In 1893, keeping step with many other educational groups, the librarians essayed a Congress of Librarians at Chicago, in connection with the World's Columbian Exposition. On paper, the program looks impressive. The subjects were well chosen, names internationally prominent stood sponsor for the papers, and a number of the contributions, when printed, attracted some attention in the bibliothecal world. But as an international affair the Congress had its limitations, for of those who personally attended and took part in it about two hundred were Americans, one came from Germany, and four from England. The meeting of the A.L.A. which immediately followed this international congress was an exceptionally successful one. Dewey, who had been its secretary for the first fourteen years of its history, was president that year. Three hundred and eleven were present, the largest number attending any conference in the history of the association up to that date.

In 1897 an international conference was held in London and ninety-three Americans responded to the call, three of whom were delegated by the United States government. Again, a similar gathering was held in Brussels in 1910 and forty-six went over from this side. It seems clear that international gatherings can corral larger overseas delegations when they are held in Europe.

In 1904, in connection with the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis, another international conference was held, and this called forth a very creditable attendance from foreign countries. In fact, the occasion was a notable one in our annals.

Herbert Putnam, head of the Library of Congress, presided, and in addition to a goodly and interested attendance from this country, delegates were present from Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, The Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Japan, China, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, as well as from our neighbor, Canada, which in A.L.A. circles does not rank as a foreign land, inasmuch as the term "American" is construed in the roll of the American Library Association to include book folk from both sides of our invisible line. Most of these foreign visitors brought official credentials from their home governments and they were thus able to speak with an authority which delegates to library gatherings had seldom before possessed.

#### DIVISIONAL GROUPS

With the growth and development of libraries, specialization and the establishment of groups for the consideration and discussion of special phases of work became not only desirable but necessary. The librarians of college and reference libraries were the first to avail themselves of the provisions of the constitution, forming, in 1889, when the A.L.A. was but thirteen years old, a section, where, by a separate program at a meeting apart from the general body, they could more intimately discuss their peculiar problems. The following year library trustees formed a similar section, the catalogers followed suit in 1900, and in the intervening years other sections have similarly been established by the children's librarians, by those intimately concerned with professional training, by the librarians of agricultural libraries, by school librarians, by chiefs and assistants in the lending departments, and by those engaged in the work of training classes in public libraries. All these sections maintain a formal organization from year to year, conduct programs at the annual conferences of the American Library Association, and take under consideration questions relating more particularly to their own provinces.

The governing council of the A.L.A. early made provision also for the affiliation with the parent organization of national associations of kindred purpose. Four special groups have established themselves as independent organizations, but all are affiliated with the A.L.A. These are the National Association of State Libraries, the American Association of Law Libraries, the League of Library Commissions, and the Special Libraries Association. These organizations usually hold their annual conferences at the same time and place as the A.L.A., and, although having a separate membership list; throw their meetings open to all members of the American Library Association.

#### HEADQUARTERS ESTABLISHMENT

For over thirty years the A.L.A. conducted all its work, except its publishing activities, without headquarters offices and, save for one or two brief periods, with no paid personnel. Where the annually elected secretary hung his hat was headquarters and his compensation was a good conscience for having served well a worthy cause. By 1909, however, the increase in membership and some other fortunate circumstances made possible a modest start toward the establishment of permanent headquarters and the employment of a salaried executive. But even this frugal beginning could not have been made had it not been for the generosity of the Chicago Public Library, which for nearly fifteen years provided free, comfortable and commodious quarters in its main building. Now, with a paid staff of over fifty, in expanded quarters, with a generous subsidy provided by the Carnegie Corporation, most fortunately bridging the critical period until an adequate endowment can be acquired, the functionings of the A.L.A. have attained a magnitude undreamed of by the pioneers of fifty years ago. But we are not, we trust, unmindful that the present measure of successful accomplishment is truly due to the years of faithful, unselfish, and unremunerated service rendered by those whose names make up the honor roll of our Association.



Soon after the United States entered the war in the spring of 1917, the War and Navy Departments, through their Commissions on Training Camp Activities, asked the American Library Association to provide reading material for the men in the training camps and elsewhere. A committee of the A.L.A. was appointed, plans were formulated and a campaign was put on to raise the necessary money—"A million dollars for a million books for a million men" was the slogan in that first drive. But the slogan was not accurate in its statement, for nearly two million dollars rolled in, the books bought and given soon exceeded three millions, and we do not need to be reminded of the number of our young men who responded to the call to arms. Headquarters were offered by and accepted in the Library of Congress and Dr. Herbert Putnam, its head, took the general directorship of the work. The Carnegie Corporation provided money for library buildings in all the large army camps and cantonments; the Red Cross buildings, the hospitals, the hostess houses, the Y.M.C.A. huts, the K. of C., the Jewish Welfare, all provided space for the books, magazines and newspapers furnished under the auspices of the A.L.A.; some of the ablest librarians of the country left their home jobs and organized the camp libraries; those at home kept on collecting books, a surprisingly large percentage of which were acceptable; and as our troops went to France the book service went too. On the transports, on the warships, at the debarkation camps, in the hospitals, books and magazines were placed, and, when the exigencies of warfare permitted the transportation of things not absolutely necessary, they reached the trenches.

The quality of the reading done surprised all those engaged in the enterprise. While it was expected that the men would welcome their home papers, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and Zane Grey's novels, few anticipated the actual situation. But it was an ambitious army; the private wanted to be a corporal, the corporal wanted to be a sergeant, and the sergeant dreamed of leather puttees and of bars on his shoulders. And they all clamored for

books on military matters which would help them attain their goal. History and biography and all kinds of science and technology were in such demand that headquarters could not supply the camps fast enough. Never was there such downright satisfaction in book service, was the uniform report of the camp librarians. Many of the men were from the rural districts where public libraries did not exist and from homes where books were few. Some of these men, of course, never looked at a book or darkened the doorway of an A.L.A. camp library. But others took to their new opportunities as ducks to water, and later, when they went back home, many of them wrote to the American Library Association to see if books could not still be borrowed, or, better yet, for advice as to how to get libraries started in their towns. And this heaven is still working.

After the armistice came the peak of the Library War Service. It was reached about April, 1919. All interest in military books died a sudden death on November 11, 1918. After that they were not worth the room they took up. But in addition to the light reading of magazines and novels a tremendous interest developed in books dealing with, as the A.L.A. phrased it, "Your Job Back Home." Many men saw and grasped the opportunity to qualify themselves, through study, for better positions in civilian life. They were still in France, transportation was a matter of time, and to keep up the morale as well as to give them something really useful to do, schools and even military universities, like the one at Beaune, were established. The library service of the A.L.A. was, as the army officials expressed it, indispensable. The wooden buildings quickly thrown together by army engineers were crowded; the library personnel had their hands full of real college reference work; never were books more appreciated than in those lonely days in a far country, when waiting for embarkation orders.

As to the bulk of this war service, a few figures will set it forth more eloquently than it can be otherwise expressed. At its peak there were library buildings in 64 large camps and stations in

America and abroad; 1886 branches and stations in these camps; there were libraries in 933 of the smaller army camps and posts, naval and marine stations; 1150 vessels were supplied with books; there were libraries in 259 hospitals, and a personnel of 740 aside from enlisted men detailed for service. And the organization used — we might appropriately say, used *up*—about seven million books. It was the largest library system ever yet operated. And certainly it was the most extensive, with books bearing the A.L.A. War Service bookplate reaching our men in America, France, Germany, Siberia, the Philippine Islands, the West Indies, the Canal Zone, Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, Nicaragua and China, and on board ship everywhere. All this service was given for about six million dollars contributed by the American people in two campaigns, plus a grant from the Carnegie Corporation for buildings, many thousands of donated books, and the freely given time of many interested individuals at home and in the field.

#### THE AMERICAN LIBRARY IN PARIS

Elsewhere in this sketch we have commented on some of the Association's international contacts. The most important feature of its present overseas relations is an outgrowth of this war service. When library service was being given to our men in France it was necessary, of course, to have a central assembling and distributing library in Paris, and, quite as a by-product at first, it soon began to fill an important need in supplying English and American books and magazines to the English-speaking people of Paris. So welcome was this service that the Americans and English there joined hands with the American Library Association in having it continued. The American Library in Paris, as it is known, was incorporated under American laws, a local board of trustees was chosen, and they, in close conjunction with the officers of the A.L.A., are now operating this library, whose usefulness is gradually extending to various parts of Europe. From the first it has been in charge of an American librarian. For the

past two years a training school for librarians, under American or American-trained instructors, has been conducted by the A.L.A. in connection with the library. Many French and Belgians have there received instruction and have gone out from the school to put American public library methods into practice in various parts of their respective countries. Those who know its work best feel that the dissemination of American ideas which this library has effected has been a feature of no inconsiderable influence in building up a better international understanding.

#### LIBRARY SCHOOLS

Like members of all professions and most vocations librarians have developed schools for training in their own technique. Soon after the A.L.A. was founded, a man of no less vision than Justin Winsor, the head of the Boston Public Library, and the Association's first president, stated that there were no training schools for librarians and he doubted if the time would ever come when any were needed, feeling, we suppose, that the training obtained by actual experience in well administered institutions would entirely fill the needs. But it was not long before the topic was being discussed and librarians began to express their belief that systematic professional training was needed and should be available. The subject first came before the A.L.A. in 1883, when, at its annual conference, Melvil Dewey, who by that time had changed his *locus operandi* from Amherst to Columbia, reported that the latter institution was considering the establishment of a library school. The A.L.A., by formal resolution, expressed its interest, plans went forward, and in January, 1887, the first library school in the country—the first in any country—opened its doors at Columbia University, under the directorship of Mr. Dewey. When Dewey went to the New York State Library in 1889, he took the school along with him, and there it has since had a steady growth and a creditable career. Other schools were established later, some in the east, some in the Mississippi Valley and in the South, and finally several on the Pacific

Coast. Now there are more than a dozen such schools in various parts of the country, connected usually with a college, a state university or a public library. This coming summer, the University of Chicago, at the request of the A.L.A., is to conduct a school in the teaching of library science for instructors in library schools, the first normal school course (if one may use that term) to be given in this field.

#### PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

The development of libraries in the past half-century is naturally reflected in the technical literature of the profession, both in its quality and in its quantity. Until the middle of the nineteenth century the output was practically nil. In 1849, Charles C. Jewett collected statistics and other facts about the libraries of the country, publishing, in 1851, the information thus gathered as an appendix to the fourth annual report of the Smithsonian Institution. It comprised two hundred seven octavo pages and was the most complete compendium on the subject issued up to that time.

The extremely valuable and extensive report on public libraries issued by the United States Bureau of Education in 1876 has already been mentioned. This was in a very true sense the corner stone of literature on the subject of libraries in this country, and a large, rather ponderous, sometimes dry, but withal useful superstructure has been built on this foundation.

The American Library Association was but ten years old when its members began to be so acutely aware of certain lacunae in their professional literature that steps were taken to supply the lack. A so-called Publishing Section was formed, "to secure," so read the minutes, "the preparation and publication of such catalogs, indexes, and other bibliographical helps as may best be produced by cooperation." Librarians have always been strong on cooperation and on the whole these measures have brought good results. Dr. Poole, for example, would probably never have been able to compile the various issues of his extensive indexes

to periodicals if the laborious and tedious task of minutely analyzing the contents of thousands of British and American magazines had not been divided up between a dozen or more collaborators. And the same measures were applied to an index to some 120,000 portraits, to an analytical index to the contents of several hundred volumes of a composite nature, and to other similar enterprises.

One of the A.L.A. exhibits at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 was a model library of 5,000 volumes recommended for a small library. A catalog or list of the books was compiled by the A.L.A. committee in charge, and was published by the Bureau of Education, that governmental agency which has so willingly and effectively upheld the hands of its library colleagues on many occasions. A similar list of 8,000 selected books was prepared for the St. Louis fair in 1904, and the catalog printed. These lists of choice books, together with their supplements, and the magazine of book selection, the *Booklist*, which the A.L.A. has issued since 1905, are among the most widely appreciated enterprises of our national association. They have helped hundreds of newly established libraries all over the country to make their initial purchases and have thus assured to these little libraries a worthy selection in place of the mediocre scourings that otherwise might have found their way to the shelves.

The publications of the A.L.A., ranging from pamphlets to ponderous indexes the size of a Webster's "Unabridged," have included works on the administration of libraries, on various technical processes such as cataloging and classification, on library legislation, book selection, work with schools, with children outside of schools, with the foreign-born, and on a wide variety of other allied subjects.

Especially significant among the recent publications is a little series of reading courses, which has been called "Reading with a Purpose." Popular subjects such as biology, American and English literature, appreciation of music, famous biographies, and others to the extent of more than a dozen have been surveyed

by experts in their respective fields, and in each monograph a half dozen or so of the best books on that particular subject have been recommended and commented on. These little books, which libraries all over the country are distributing by sale or loan, are greatly stimulating the reading of worthy books, and we trust that at least some of this study has been done "with a purpose" and not merely as desultory reading. Among the authors of this little series are men like Vernon Kellogg, Daniel Gregory Mason, William Allen White, Dallas Lore Sharp, Jesse Lee Bennett, Alexander Meiklejohn and Wilfred T. Grenfell.

Of course the publications of the A.L.A. are by no means all that are issued on the subject of libraries and library work. The year 1876 saw also the birth of the first library periodical, the *Library Journal*, of New York, the first number of which appeared about a month before the Philadelphia conference, and which unquestionably helped to launch the new movement. In 1896, another monthly journal, *Public Libraries*, was started in Chicago, and in these two magazines and in the official *Bulletin* of the A.L.A., much of the important shop-talk of our calling has appeared.

Comparatively little about library service and librarianship has been written for the general public. In the past fifty years our professional writing, for family consumption, has grown to imposing, almost appalling proportions. We librarians can scarcely read it all. But not enough has been said, in form and vehicle which has reached the general public, in regard to the service which our libraries have to offer as instruction, as inspiration and as recreation. Save for exceptions which a one-armed man might count on his fingers, few of our craft have developed much ability to write, and thus far the story which libraries have to tell has not seemed dramatic enough or spectacular enough to enlist the pens of able writers outside our own circle. *The American public library* (Appleton, third edition, 1923), by Arthur E. Bostwick, librarian of the St. Louis Public Library, and *The American public library and the diffusion of knowledge* (Harcourt, Brace,

1924), by William S. Learned, a special investigator, associated with the Carnegie Corporation at the time the book was written, are two recent books which can confidently be recommended to those who wish to acquire a general knowledge of American public library service and of its future possibilities. But even though high lights are few and not enough has been written with an eye to the general public, the literature of librarianship has exerted a wide professional influence and it is one of the significant features of this fifty-year period.

#### LIBRARY BUILDINGS

A conspicuous visible change in this fifty-year period is in the development and improvement of library architecture. Internal changes of policy, increased efficiency of service, growth of book collections, all evolve gradually, and even though important, are not spectacular to look upon. But when a library blossoms out in a brand-new suit of clothes the transition is sudden and the achievement visual. We are far from satisfied with the present influence of the library on the community, but from the material side we feel that great advance has been made in the matter of "sticks and stones." To appreciate this, we have only to recall the beauty of the Library of Congress, both in external dignity and in the impressiveness of its interior, especially as one enters the central hall by night and sees it in its flood of electric glory; or to compare some of the early mansard horrors with the classic lines of the New York Public Library, or with the Italian renaissance of the "Boston Public," or with the general civic satisfactoriness of the new municipal libraries in Detroit and Cleveland. From the old days when, as we have seen, the college library was, like as not, tucked into a back room in some administration building, it is a far call to the spaciousness of such campus-dominating structures as have been reared in recent years, for example, at Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan and Minnesota, or to the new building now in process of construction at Yale, fit companion to its superb Harkness Memorial. Surely



fifty years of librarianship have made a real contribution to American architecture.

#### THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Speaking of the Library of Congress, one can not offer even this hurried survey without at least brief reference to the influence of that notable institution on our last half century. The year 1876 found the so-called Library of Congress merely a cluttered up pile of dusty, ragged, uncataloged and largely unclassified books reposing peacefully and undisturbedly in a crowded room of the National Capitol. Fifty years later finds the Library of Congress not only housed in one of the handsomest structures of Washington, but its service so widely availed of that it is in every way, except in name, our National Library. That the three million volumes within its walls furnish material for the almost interminable speeches which try the soul of our worthy vice-president and bulge the files of the *Congressional Record* is a crime for which we must not hold the library responsible. It is pleasanter to recall how its sphere of influence has enlarged in the past thirty years—how instead of being literally the library of Congress its wealth of printed books, manuscripts and music scores is now the mecca of scholars from every state of the Union; and how, through an expanding system of inter-library loans, this service is being made available to hundreds of scholars at their local libraries. The inauguration of this inter-library loan system is, by the way, one of the far-reaching and important developments of the past generation. Fifty years ago it was difficult enough to extract a book from a library just for home reading; the worthy librarian would probably not have survived the shock had he been asked to send one of his carefully guarded tomes to a distant city. Now the inter-library loan system is general throughout the country. If your home library does not have the book you need for the study you are making, it will borrow it for you from some other institution. Thousands of books are in this way traveling hither and yon about the country every year, aid-

ing greatly in the promotion of serious study. And if the book is too precious to be subjected to the risks of the road the roto-graphic reproduction comes to the scholar's relief and, for a small fee, an exact facsimile of the original is magically produced.

#### THE PART OF CARNEGIE

Library progress throughout the English-speaking world was, of course, profoundly affected by the advent of Andrew Carnegie on the scene. Indeed, it is not too much to say that if Carnegie were left out of the chapter the history of the American library movement would need to be entirely rewritten. As a poor boy in Dunfermline he had no books to read, and when he emigrated to America at the age of thirteen and went to work in an Allegheny bobbin factory, his condition at first in that respect was not much better. But soon afterwards, as we all know from his frequent repetition of the story, a generous man, by the name of James Anderson, gave young Carnegie and other ambitious boys a chance to borrow books from his private library. However it may have been with other beneficiaries, the young Scotchman always considered himself under obligation to Colonel Anderson, and felt that the only way in which he could pay his debt was to help other young people in the way he had been helped. But his canny business sense realized the importance of not pauperizing those whom he helped, and so he always required the community to which he gave money for a library building to agree to support the library from tax funds, as well as to provide a site for the building. "This is the kind of gift," once said President Roosevelt, speaking at the dedication of a Carnegie library, "that steers the happy middle course between the Charybdis of failure to show public spirit on the one hand, and on the other the Scylla of showing that public spirit in a way that will demoralize and pauperize those who take advantage of it. To use an expression I am fond of, this is equally far from the two prime vices of our civilization—'hardness of heart and softness of head.'"

Carnegie began his work of founding and aiding libraries in 1881, when he gave a building to his native town of Dunfermline. It was followed by the gift of a building to Allegheny City, his first home in America, and soon after, he gave a library building to Pittsburgh, stating that in his avowed policy of aiding in the establishment of free public libraries he had been influenced by the example of Enoch Pratt, a merchant of Baltimore, who, shortly before, had given over a million dollars for the establishment and maintenance of a free library system in the city of which he had been a resident for nearly fifty years. Making an immense fortune in the production of steel, Carnegie eventually found himself extensively launched in the library manufacturing business. Some idea of the magnitude of the undertaking at its height is gained from this extract from his remarks at the dedication of the Carnegie library in Washington, January 7, 1903. "I shall not descant," said he, "upon the advantages of the free library, but this seems an opportune occasion to explain just what the free library business means, upon which I have embarked. Seven hundred and thirty library buildings have been given, chiefly within the last two years, and most of them are built or under construction. During July last two hundred and seventy-six applications for library buildings were received from various parts of the English-speaking world, all of which were or are being dealt with. Upon arrival in New York last month we found over four hundred and fifty additional applications from the United States and Canada awaiting inquiry and decision, in regard to nearly all of which my secretaries are now in correspondence.

" . . . We have today three hundred and eighty-five new applications on hand. . . . One reason for mentioning these figures is that it may relieve us of the charge of rudeness in not replying to the thousand and one suggestions which are made, urging entrance upon other fields of usefulness, while we are unable to keep pace with the demands of the work in hand. In my first public address made to our young men in Pittsburgh—how many years ago I need not mention—I told them to put

all their eggs in one basket and then watch that basket. I have been a concentrator all my life."

And this is largely, although not strictly, true, for although Mr. Carnegie gave large sums for teachers' pensions, for historical and scientific research, for peace propaganda, for hero funds, and other objects which interested him, it is with the development of the free public library system that his name is most closely associated. Altogether he gave over sixty-five million dollars to build, equip, or endow nearly three thousand libraries in this and other countries, and the Carnegie Corporation, which he founded and endowed, continued the work. It is no longer providing money for the erection of buildings, feeling, since the war, that its funds and efforts can be more wisely expended in helping to intensify and improve the service given in already existing libraries, and, through a central agency, encouraging library extension. So for several years the Corporation has been liberally subsidizing the work of the American Library Association, assisting in its publications, in its plans for better professional training for librarians, and for promoting home education through libraries. And it has also given financial assistance to the League of Library Commissions for demonstration work in lines of library extension in rural communities. The latter work is conducted in the frank conviction that there are too many small town libraries, each an independent unit with overhead costs which eat up about all that should be spent on books and expert service. So there is now a distinct swing to a larger unit. The county library is the most practical in most parts of the country—one central system with branches, deposit stations, book automobiles, and parcel post service reaching to all sections. Thus while there is one organization only requiring overhead expenditure, there is a vast network of effective, smoothly-working plants covering thoroughly the whole geographical unit. Something of this sort is the only way of reaching the eighty per cent of the nation's rural dwellers who now have no access to public books, and whose private libraries are negligible.

## LOOKING AHEAD

No one knows better than do librarians how far short they fall of their worthy goal of providing good reading material for every man, woman, and child who needs it. And no one knows better than librarians that the reading they do provide is but a mere drop in the vast sea of print, pouring down upon us and threatening to inundate us, the undertow of which is so powerful that at times we are swept beyond all reach of the refreshing and stimulating currents of true literature and of the gentle influence of things which are honest and of good report.

But we librarians are optimists. When we compare the position which the public library now holds with that which it held fifty years ago we take heart and hope for great things in the fifty years to come. Recalling that a generation ago only ten per cent of the people of the land had access to public libraries, the news that now only sixty per cent have such access is not a discouragement but a challenge. In public book service we are where we were a generation ago in public school service. A generation hence perhaps every dweller in the land may be able, through the skilled guidance of public books, to carry on his education beyond school years just as now our boys and girls have education brought to them through the compulsory schools. At present we are spending forty to fifty dollars on our public schools to every dollar spent on our public libraries. That the amount of expenditure should be equal is not advocated by the most radical librarian—a ratio of ten to one is considered proper by those who have given study to the matter, and, in view of the usually liberal appropriations made to schools, this proportion would enable libraries to increase vastly both the quality and the quantity of the service which they are now rendering.

Approximately two billion dollars were spent last year on the public schools of the country and during the same period the public libraries spent only about forty millions, or approximately thirty-five cents apiece for each man, woman, and child, and only about fifty-five cents apiece for those who were within the geographic

range of public library accessibility. A dollar per capita, per annum, is, in the opinion of the American Library Association, the minimum amount with which a public library can give satisfactory service to its constituents, and few cities there be which have yet arrived at even this minimum goal. But librarians feel that they are on the way, and their history bids them be of good cheer as it shows them the distance traveled in a relatively short period of time.

The fundamental points in the fifty-year development of the municipally supported public library are, in the recently expressed opinion of Arthur E. Bostwick, of St. Louis, free access and home use. "In other words," says he, "the extension of accessibility has been first in the direction of letting readers see and handle the books themselves instead of being restricted to a catalog, and second, in that of allowing readers to use books at home instead of confining such use to the library building."

Probably twenty-five millions of the inhabitants of the United States availed themselves last year of this freedom of access, and approximately two hundred and fifty million books were borrowed from libraries and read at home. And millions more, of course, were read or consulted within the library buildings. This has nearly all come about in fifty years of librarianship. But it is not a great achievement; it is hardly more than a beginning, a mere scratching of the ground. The best days are ahead. The American Library Association and its eight thousand members pause for only a glance at their history. Their eyes are turned ahead, for they are more concerned with what the *next* fifty years will bring.











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